The Work of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps in Greece

By LIEUT.-COL. J. C. RIX*

DURING the short sojourn of the British Forces in Greece in the spring of 1941, the R.A.V.C. played a small and brief part, although perhaps an active one. It is now a matter of history that the plans of that campaign were never brought to fruition, and this is equally true of that part of them connected with animal units and veterinary remount organization.

On 19th March, Captain J. C. Rix (as he then was) embarked at Alexandria for Greece as S.V.O., British Troops; in the same ship was No. 5 Cavalry Mobile Veterinary Section, with Captain R. C. Crowhurst in command, and the advance party of No. 1 Remount Squadron (later No. 1 Field Remount Depot). At this time the amalgamation of the Veterinary and Remount Services was not officially effective in the Middle East, and the two services set out for the Greek campaign as separate organizations. Captain Rix established an office at Headquarters, British Troops in Greece, in the Hotel Acropole, Athens, and obtained a ruling from the D.Q.M.G. that he was to administer both services since amalgamation had already been sanctioned in the United Kingdom.

The location of the Cavalry Mobile Veterinary Section, the Remount Squadron and the Veterinary Hospital (No. 3 Veterinary Hospital) had already been decided upon by Headquarters, 80 Base Sub-area. Apart from the construction of two kraals nothing had been done in the way of R.E. work and plenty of hard work lay ahead of the two base units before any sign of a veterinary hospital or remount depot could be expected. The site chosen was at Stephani, about ten miles from Athens to the south-west and situated in the foothills of a range of high ground. The camp was bisected by the narrow-guage railway line running from Athens to the Peliponnese Peninsula and this would have afforded an opportunity to construct a suitable siding for the loading and offloading of animals and forage. Such an opportunity, of course, never occurred. There were many disadvantages in the site selected, especially the unhealthy marshy country and the proximity to a large airfield, the naval base and a Greek ammunition dump. As things turned out, there was no time to make any alterations and the units could only make the best of things and prepare to receive the first consignment of mules due to arrive very soon.

The first mules to land in Greece were shipped from India in H.T. "Quiloa" a vessel particularly well fitted for mule and horse conveyance. It is greatly to the credit of those responsible that this shipload arrived with no casualties among a consignment of 800 first-class A.T. mules (the veterinary officer in charge being Capt. K. I. Barlow). Before the "Quiloa" was due to arrive in Pireus docks a reconnaissance had been made by the S.V.O. for a means to effect the rapid disembarkation of these animals and their speedy removal from the port area to the comparative safety of the remount depot. As things turned out, the plans never materialized, as the port of Pireus was rendered useless by heavy enemy air bombardment while the ship lay in the waters outside. Moreover, the sea in the area of the Sala-

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mis Straits was sown so thickly with magnetic mines that it was considered extremely hazardous to move the ship at all.

At this time the German offensive in the north had begun and the need for pack mules became urgent. On about 10th April the D.Q.M.G. sent for the S.V.O. and ordered him to take whatever steps he liked to get these mules and their equipment ashore. Accordingly, the naval authorities were informed and he was given a free hand. The ship was eventually brought through the minefield and tied up by the stern to a small jetty.

A whole company of a pioneer unit worked most of the night and early morning unloading these animals and leading them to the kraals, a distance of about a mile and a half. Pack equipment of all kinds was also unloaded and at the request of "Q" conveyed to the remount camp. On reporting the completion of this to the D.Q.M.G., the S.V.O. was ordered to arrange the urgent preparation of 200 mules and their equipment for a move northwards at the earliest possible moment. Accordingly, the mules were selected and the work of assembling the pack saddlery and other gear commenced. The men of the Remount Squadron worked long and hard to get this equipment ready. At this stage, 14th April, Major Bell (as he then was) arrived from the Sudan to take over duty as D.A.D.V. and R.S., and shortly afterwards No. 3 Veterinary Hospital, with Major J. Clabby, M.B.E., in command, and made camp in the site adjacent to the Remount Squadron. The personnel of No. 3 Pack Transport Company, R.A.S.C., appeared about this time also and were located close to Stephani Camp, but were evacuated within a week of arrival. The mules and animal party of this unit sailed in a ship called the "Santa Clara Valley" which was sunk in Greek waters some time later. Practically all the mules were drowned, although rescue work was actually undertaken for those in the unsubmerged stern of the vessel. Under the direction of Major Clabby, some of these were thrown overboard and swam ashore. Those that were injured or not easily accessible were destroyed. Details are not yet available, but it was undoubtedly a fine piece of humanitarian work.

Demands for fully equipped mules continued to come in and some 250 animals were dispatched to the forward area by train. It must be remembered that at this stage there were no pack transport companies in Greece, so that pack transport had to be improvised by the fighting units themselves aided by detachments from the Remount Squadron. Events were moving so swiftly that no possibility of rearward evacuation of animal casualties ready to move, was not sent forward. It was apparent that a rapid withdrawal of our forces south with eventual evacuation was to be the plan. The pack mules were invaluable for short periods, but the question of their salvage could never be considered and our task was to get them where they were wanted just as fast as we could.

On 23rd April orders were received which resulted in the long and hazardous journey back to Egypt, a journey which, unfortunately, not all of us completed. Major Clabby and most of No. 3 Veterinary Hospital were unlucky in their allocation of a beach and were captured together with most of No. 5 Cavalry Mobile Veterinary Section and three-quarters of the Remount Squadron, including five officers and most of the senior non-commissioned officers.

An account of the escape of Captain R. C. Crowhurst was published in a previous issue of the Journal. The operations in Greece were short and

sharp, but even so the R.A.V.C. and the Remount Service played their part. The hastily equipped and unfit mules working under the disadvantages of improvisation were of service and helped considerably in the supply problems associated with fighting troops in mountainous country.

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How Egg Powder is Made for Britain

THE DRYING of eggs in Canada for delivery to the British Ministry of Food in the form of powder is an outstanding example of the highly developed methods of sanitation and expert workmanship in vogue in the production of Canadian food products. The work is carried on under the Special Products Board.

The success of Canadian egg powder really begins with the high quality of the shell eggs used, while the drying plants, of which there are nine at present working under the strict supervision of the Board, are models of sanitation. No detail is overlooked. The lids of all cases of the graded and inspected eggs arriving at the plants must be removed outside the breaking room, and the eggs transferred to sanitary buckets or other suitable containers. From the buckets the eggs are taken directly to the breaking table and broken by girls in white overalls. A stainless steel knife is used to break the eggs into a stainless steel cup on a tray, and as each egg is cracked and the shell separated, the girls raise it to about chin level, dropping the contents into the cup with a quick, expert jerk. This removes the thin albumen which would otherwise stick to the shell.

When two or three eggs have been broken, they are again examined for off odours in order to avoid a possible undesirable egg contaminating the contents of the cup and consequently of the whole bucket. When the cup is full, the melange—liquid eggs—is poured into a bucket and when the bucket is full it is emptied into a settling tank equipped with sieves, and from there it is pumped from a line filler to holding vats. From these vats, the melange can either be pumped to the drier or poured into moulds and put into a sharp freezer. The melange arrives at the vats at low temperature around 35 to 40 degrees, and from the vats, high pressure pumps force it directly to the drier.

When the melange comes from the nozzle it resembles a small cloud of mist which is immediately picked up by the inlet air and carried part of the way in the air current before it becomes dry and fai - as a powder to the bottom of the chamber. The powder is continually removed by an auger and conveyed to the sifter. As the powder travels, it is cooled to a temperature at which powder must be packed. The packaging is a process which requires full supervision at all times, in common with every phase of converting a shell egg into dried egg powder.

From the moment that eggs destined for egg powder are purchased by the Special Products Board they are practically under continuous inspection until delivery in the form of powder to the British Ministry of